

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## Chapter 16: The Beginning of the End

**Key Question:** What can we learn from Ahaz and Hezekiah about trusting God in difficult times?

### Assyria's Attacks

Pages 219–222

To Israel's north, the Assyrian empire grew powerful and threatening. In 735 BC, the kings of Israel and Aram tried to force the newly crowned king of Judah, Ahaz, to join a coalition against Assyria. When he refused, they attacked, threatening to replace him with a king who would comply.

God sent the prophet Isaiah<sup>196</sup> to encourage Ahaz king of Judah not to be afraid, for he wouldn't let them overthrow him. He told Ahaz to ask for any sign as proof.<sup>197</sup> But Ahaz refused and instead sought Assyria's<sup>198</sup> help. He voluntarily became a vassal<sup>199</sup> to Assyria's king, paid him a large tribute, and set up shrines to Assyria's gods in Jerusalem.

In return, Assyria's king attacked and deported Aram's people.<sup>200</sup> Then he attacked Israel and took over all but the hill country of Ephraim<sup>201</sup> and forced her new king, Hoshea, to be a tribute-paying vassal.<sup>202</sup> Many Israelites fled south to Judah.

Eventually Hoshea king of Israel stopped paying tribute. Assyria responded brutally. The royal city of Samaria fell in 722, and the nation of Israel was no more.<sup>203</sup> Assyria deported Israel's inhabitants to other lands within its empire, replacing them with captives from other conquered nations.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Isaiah began prophesying in Judah in 740 BC, a little after Hosea began prophesying in Israel.

<sup>197</sup> Isaiah 7:11–12.

<sup>198</sup> 2 Kings 16:7.

<sup>199</sup> In such a relationship, the Assyrian king was called a *suzerain*, or *king of kings*. The vassal king submitted to the suzerain, paid tribute, and provided troops. In return the suzerain protected the vassal. The kings of Israel and Judah were supposed to be vassals of God.

<sup>200</sup> Aram fell in 732 (see the timelines on the last page).

<sup>201</sup> John H. Walton, ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Iaian Provan 2009), 3:172.

<sup>202</sup> 2 Kings 15:29.

<sup>203</sup> The northern kingdom of Israel split from Judah in 930 and fell two centuries later. For perspective, consider how far the United States moved from the Biblical principles on which it was founded in just two centuries.

<sup>204</sup> 2 Kings 17:6, 24. Assyria designated this area the province of Samerina. Agricultural workers probably stayed behind. The mix of people were called the Samaritans by New Testament times.

1. (a) How had the Lord sought to keep Israel whole (2 Kings 17:13)? (b) How did the Israelites respond (17:14)? (c) Why does obedience require trust in the Lord? (d) Prayerfully consider if there is any area in which you are not obeying God. If so, ask God to show you where you lack trust and write out steps you will take to obey God.

Meanwhile in Judah, Ahaz found that Assyria gave him more trouble than help.<sup>205</sup> He abandoned the God of Abraham altogether and built an altar to the god of Damascus in the Jerusalem temple.<sup>206</sup> He built shrines for Canaanite gods and even sacrificed his sons in the fire of the god Molech.<sup>207</sup> Finally, he shut down the temple.

Ahaz died seven years after Israel fell, leaving his son, Hezekiah, with a kingdom in spiritual and moral disarray.

Hezekiah immediately set out to turn things around. He removed the idols and shrines, reopened and purified the temple, and put the temple back into service. He planned a huge Passover celebration and sent couriers not only throughout Judah to announce it, but also into the north to invite Israelites who had escaped deportation.<sup>208</sup> He emphasized that they were all really one people under the God of Israel.<sup>209</sup>

Hezekiah stopped paying tribute to Assyria. But undoing the sins of his father proved difficult, for in 701, Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem.

2. (a) How did the Assyrian field commander try to discourage the people within Jerusalem's walls from trusting God (2 Kings 18:29–32)? (b) How does Satan similarly try to discourage us from trusting God? (c) Briefly describe a time someone tried to discourage you or a loved one from trusting God.

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<sup>205</sup> 2 Chronicles 28:20.

<sup>206</sup> 2 Kings 16:10–14.

<sup>207</sup> 2 Chronicles 28:3.

<sup>208</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:6.

<sup>209</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:5. Since only one kingdom remained, the name *Israel* again referred to all descendants of Israel.

## God's Deliverance

Pages 222–224

In the midst of the siege, Assyria's King Sennacherib sent Hezekiah a threatening letter. Hezekiah took it to the temple, spread it out before the Lord, and prayed.

3. (a) How does Hezekiah describe God (2 Kings 19:15)? (b) How does recalling God's attributes in prayer help us to trust God? (c) What does Hezekiah ask God to do in 19:16? (d) The letter said no nation's god had been able to deliver it from Assyria, and neither would Judah's God. How does Hezekiah's view differ (19:17–18)? (e) What does Hezekiah say will happen if God delivers Judah (19:19)?
  
4. Think of a situation in your life that you need to entrust to God. Find an object that symbolizes that situation, such as a letter, photo, or sketch. Lay it before you. Write a prayer based on Hezekiah's prayer. Begin by worshipping God for his attributes that you can depend on. Ask God to see your symbolic item. Explain the situation from a godly viewpoint as best as you can. Then ask for help with the situation, and thank him for using difficult circumstances to teach you how to trust him more.

God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that he would save the city.

5. How did God rescue Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35–37)?

## Judah's Judgment Foretold

Pages 224–226

Isaiah's prophecies are collected in the book bearing his name.<sup>210</sup> Chapter six describes how God called him to be a prophet years earlier.<sup>211</sup>

6. What strikes you most about Isaiah's reaction to seeing God (Isaiah 6:5–7)?

The first six chapters of Isaiah call Judah to repentance and announce exile is imminent.<sup>212</sup>

7. (a) What did Isaiah see happening to Judah in Isaiah 3:8–9? (b) What causes people to parade sin?

Isaiah announced Judah's exile wouldn't happen in Hezekiah's lifetime and would be by Babylon, not Assyria.<sup>213</sup>

8. (a) What happens to children whose parents do not discipline them? (b) What happens to countries whose citizens suffer no consequences for crimes? (c) Explain the reason for God's judgment of Judah according to Isaiah 26:9–10.

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<sup>210</sup> In the Bible, the prophetic books are separated into the major (or long) collections and minor (or short) collections. Isaiah is not arranged chronologically.

<sup>211</sup> Isaiah 6:1 refers to King Uzziah's death in 740 BC. (He was also called Azariah.)

<sup>212</sup> Isaiah 5:13.

<sup>213</sup> Isaiah 39:6–7.

## Judah's Return Promised

Pages 226–228

Though exile would come, it wouldn't last forever.

9. Even though Jacob's descendants<sup>214</sup> would be exiled, what would eventually happen (Isaiah 14:1)?

Isaiah's final chapters were written to comfort the future exiles. They are filled with promises of restoration and hope.

10. (a) What would the future exiles feel was the reason for their suffering (Isaiah 49:14)? (b) What would be the truth about their situation (49:15–16)? (c) Have your emotions ever told you something different than the Bible tells you? What do you do when that happens? (d) Explain how Isaiah 49:15–16 applies to you.

## The Messiah Promised

Pages 228–230

Isaiah spoke of a future suffering Servant who would be the perfect Israel, the Messiah, the Great High Priest who would redeem people from all nations from sin and who would make known the Holy One of Israel.

11. (a) Why do you think the Messiah would have “no beauty or majesty to attract us to him” (Isaiah 53:2)? (b) Why would it be necessary for him to be familiar with suffering (53:3)? (c) Briefly describe a time Jesus took up your pain and bore your suffering (53:4).
  
12. The table on the next page lists New Testament passages showing how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 53:4–12. Write the number of the fulfilled verse in the column on the right. (There may be more than one passage with the same verse, but verses are in order.)<sup>215</sup>

<sup>214</sup> After the northern kingdom of Israel fell, people began to again use the name *Israel* to refer to all Jews.

<sup>215</sup> Answer key: 4; 5; 5–6; 7; 7; 8; 9; 9; 9; 10; 10; 11; 11; 12; 12; 12.

New Testament Passage	Isaiah 53 Verse
When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.” <i>Matthew 8:16–17</i>	
Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. <i>John 19:34</i>	
He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. <i>1 Peter 2:24–25</i>	
The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” <i>John 1:29</i>	
When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor. <i>Matthew 27:12–14</i>	
The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. <i>Matthew 26:59</i> For [Pilate] knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. <i>Matthew 27:18</i>	
Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. <i>Matthew 27:38</i>	
As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. <i>Matthew 27:57–60</i>	
But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” <i>1 Peter 2:20–22</i>	
This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <i>Acts 2:23</i>	
For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <i>John 3:17</i>	
... that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <i>1 Corinthians 15:4</i>	
For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. <i>Romans 5:19</i>	
And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! <i>Philippians 2:8</i>	
It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me [Jesus]. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.” <i>Luke 22:37</i>	
Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. <i>Hebrews 7:25</i>	

13. What passage in Isaiah is most meaningful to you? Why?

